

# EU Expansion and the changing dynamics of EU migration to the UK

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## **Title: EU Expansion and the changing dynamics of EU migration to the UK**

Brief summary: The expansion of the European Union and the freedom to move, live and work within its borders has led to a changing pattern of migration to the UK. This article explores these patterns over the last two decades, focusing on the issues related to Eastern European migration. As a key social, political and economic issue, migration is an A Level, IB and Pre-U topic.

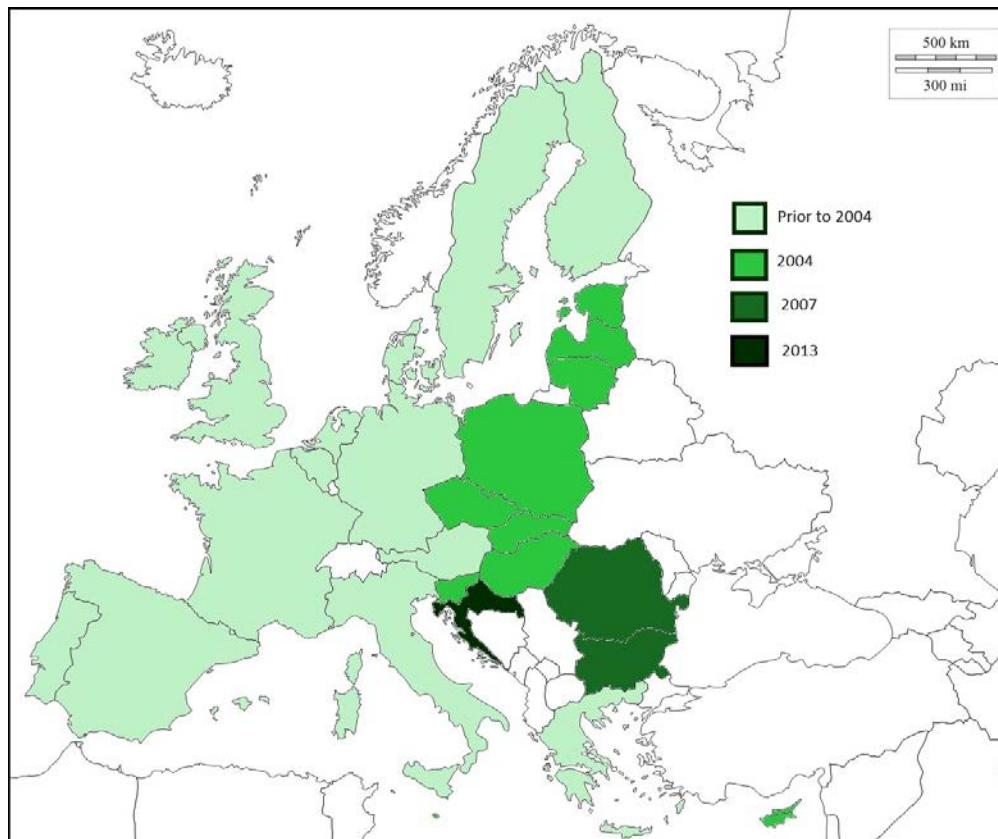
### **Introduction**

The 2011 Census revealed that 2.7 million residents of England and Wales were born in other European Union (EU) countries, of which 1.1 million were born in countries which joined the EU in 2004 or later. Migration to the UK from Central and Eastern Europe rose rapidly until 2007, when it peaked. Further enlargement of the EU, and the removal of restrictions on workers from Bulgaria and Romania in 2014 mean that the dynamics of migration may continue to change in the future.

### **EU Expansion**

Established under the 1957 Treaty of Rome there are four 'freedoms' that represent fundamental principles of the EU. According to this Treaty, goods, services, money and people should be able to move freely across the internal borders of the European Union. This means that members of the EU are able to live and work in other EU member countries. When the EU expanded in 2004 some countries placed restrictions on workers from the new member countries. However, at this time the UK did not, and experienced a wave of immigration from these new member countries. These are known as the A8 countries: namely, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania also joined the EU and this time the UK (along with seven other EU countries) placed restrictions on Bulgarians and Romanians working in the UK until 2014. In 2013 Croatia joined the European Union bringing the list of member states to 28. The stages of enlargement are shown in Figure 1.

### **Figure 1: Map of EU enlargement 2004-2013**



### Migration Patterns

Enlargement of the EU has led to changing patterns of migration within the EU, including increased migration to the UK. After the 2004 enlargement there was a larger than expected movement of economic migrants from A8 countries to the UK. While Romania and Bulgaria (sometimes called A2 countries) have been part of the EU since 2007 there have been restrictions in place which mean their citizens have not had the same rights to work in other countries as other EU members.

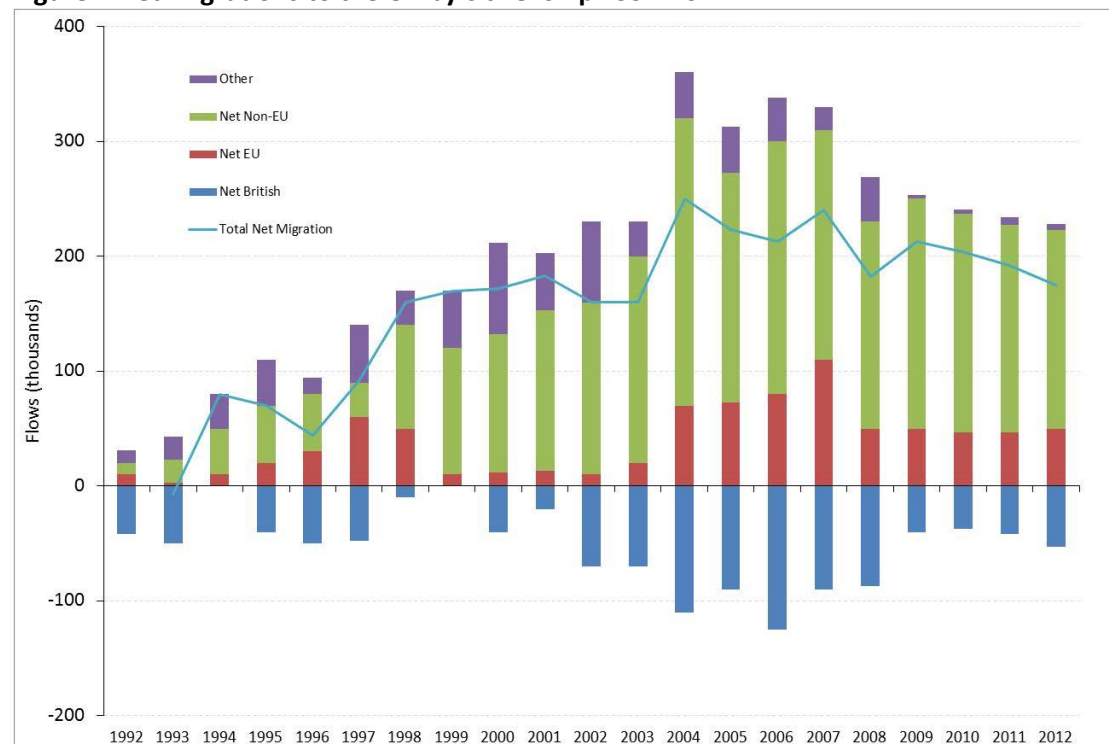
The level of migration from A8 countries to the UK after the 2004 enlargement was unexpected. Predictions have suggested up to 90,000 immigrants from the new EU countries by 2011. However, there were actually 653,000 immigrants in the UK from A8 countries between 2004-2011. The predictions were inaccurate for two reasons: first there was little historical data on migration from eastern Europe, and second after previous EU enlargements there had been few substantial changes in migration patterns, for example from Spain and Portugal.

Figure 2 shows net migration to the UK between 1992 and 2012. Net migration is the difference between the number of immigrants (people entering the country) and the number of emigrants (people leaving the country). The UK has continued to experience positive net migration as more people continue to enter than leave. Between 2004-2011 the total net migration of A8 citizens was 393,000. The onset of the financial crisis and recession in the UK meant the level of migration to the UK was reduced.

It is important to highlight that while migrants to the UK from the EU represent a significant proportion of immigration, the majority of migrants are from outside the EU (as shown in

Figure 3). A8 workers accounted for close to 14% of total (and 44% of EU) migration flows in 2011 a share that has decreased since a peak in 2007.

**Figure 2 Net Migrations to the UK by citizenship 1992-2012**



Source: Office for National Statistics

### Moving to the UK

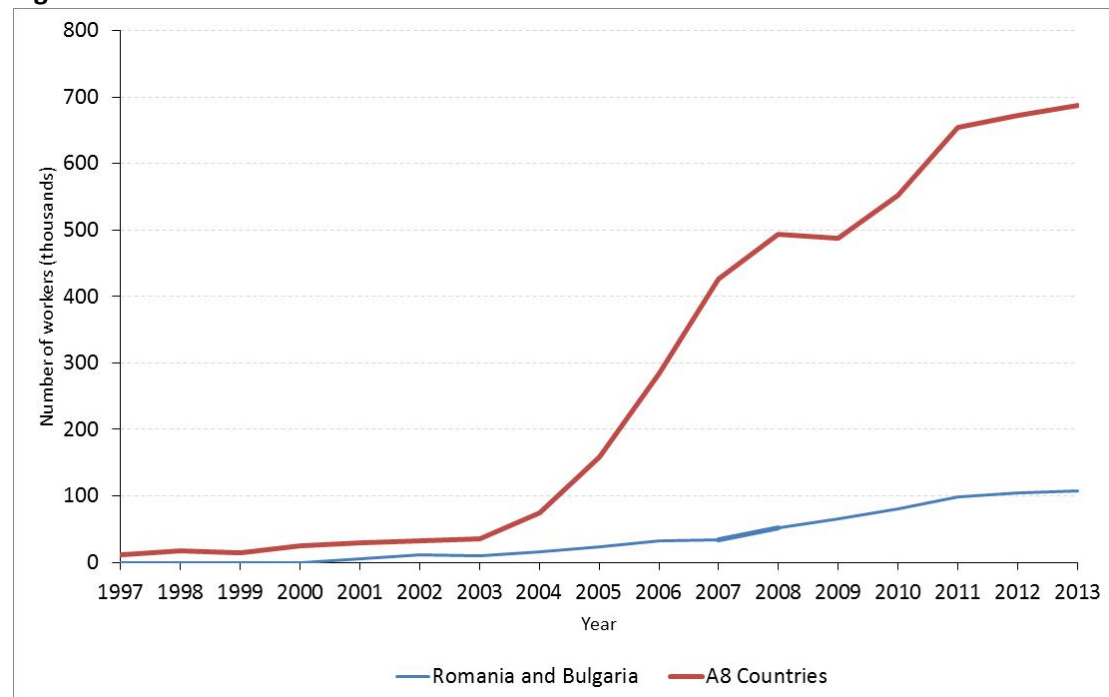
The enlargement of the EU has meant there are a greater number of countries in which EU citizens have the freedom to live and work in. There are a range of push and pull factors why people choose to migrate to the UK:

- Many people migrate in search of work, making them voluntary economic migrants. Unemployment has historically been higher in some A8 countries than in the UK. In some cases emigration from A8 countries has contributed to a declining unemployment rate. In Poland in 2004 the unemployment rate was 19.4 and this decreased to 10.7 by 2012.
- According to the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford there is still a significant income gap between A8 countries, A2 countries and the UK which provides further incentive for migration. Not only are there more opportunities for work, but there is also potential for higher earnings. For instance, the minimum wage in the UK is twice as high as the Czech Republic and over three times higher than in Bulgaria.
- Many migrants enter the UK to join other family members who are already settled in the UK.
- Many people also migrate to the UK to study. In 2009 there were over 17,000 students from A8 countries studying at Higher Education Institutions in the UK.

### Moving for work

After the EU enlargement in 2004 migrants from the new EU countries who wanted to work in the UK were required to register with the Workers Registration Scheme, although this ended in 2011. As shown in Figure 3 the number of workers from A8 countries rose rapidly after 2004 reaching a peak in 2011. At the end of 2012 there were 658,000 A8 citizens working in the UK.

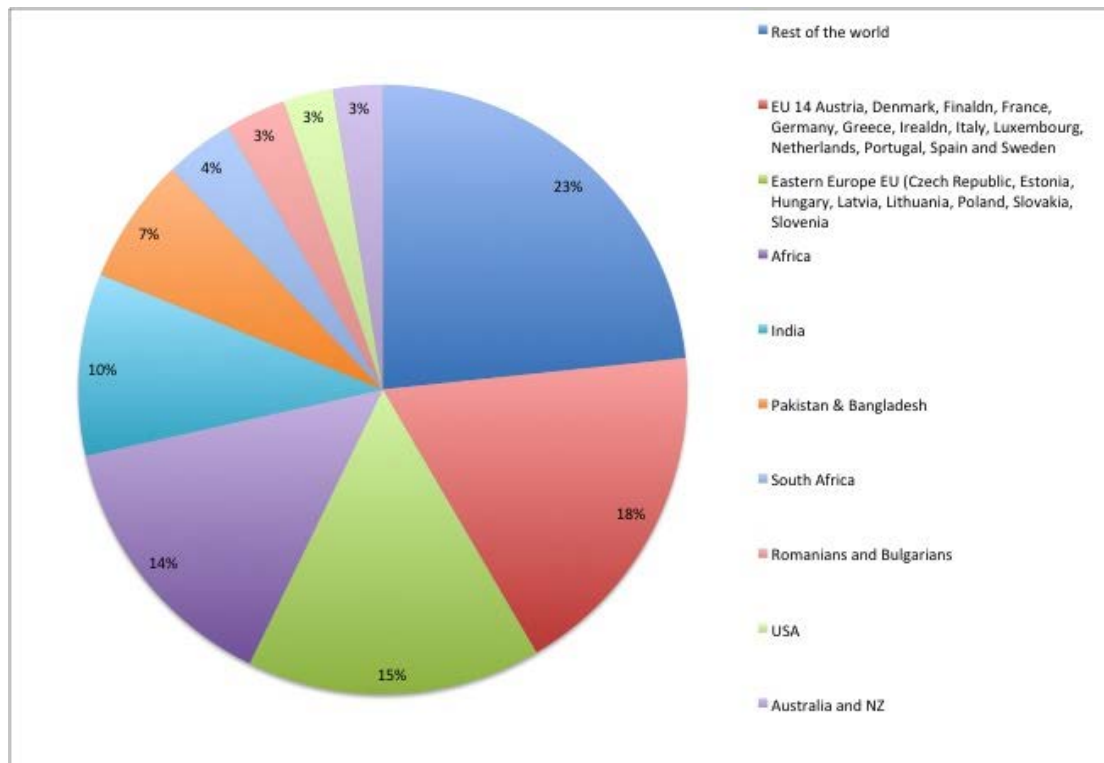
**Figure 3: A8 and A2 workers in the UK 1997-2013**



Source: Office for National Statistics

According to the think-tank 'Open Europe' free movement of people in the EU has been beneficial for the UK labour market. Employment levels of workers born in the UK remained fairly constant since EU enlargement while the level of job creation actually increased. This meant that EU migration did not lead to increased unemployment, but that many of the new jobs created did not necessarily go to those born in the UK. There is no conclusive evidence that the last wave of immigration after 2004 had a negative effect on employment in the UK. Furthermore it is important to remember that workers from elsewhere in the EU are still only relatively small percentage compared to non-EU workers in the UK, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Foreign workers in the UK by country of birth 2013**



Source: Office for National Statistics

### Living in the UK

The free movement for citizens of the European Union has had varying impacts on the UK. One impact is the prevalence of languages spoken across the country. Data from 2011 census indicates 546,000 people in England and Wales spoke Polish, making it the 2<sup>nd</sup> most common language spoken in England after English.

Jiri, aged 22, moved from Brno in the Czech Republic to the UK in 2008 and works in a cafe in Cambridge. He decided to migrate to the UK in order to improve his languages, earn some money so he could go to university and to expand his employment skills.

Alex, aged 25, moved from Katowice in Poland to Wellingborough in 2006 to work in a retail superstore after making arrangements with an employment agency. She met her husband in the UK, originally from Wroclaw, and have a daughter who speaks both Polish and English fluently. They are saving as much money as possible so that they can move back to Poland and buy a house.

Paul, aged 33, moved from Lodz to Northampton in 2005 to set up a Polish Food shop. He knew many people who had moved to the area and saw a business opportunity. He likes working in the UK and feels that he has created a business which is an important part of the community.

These are just three examples of people who have migrated to the UK (taken from my doctoral research while at Manchester University).

### Migration Concerns

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 the UK lifted its restrictions on Bulgarians and Romanians working in the UK. There was a lot of controversy in the media over the removal of these restrictions as there were concerns over a potential influx of further Eastern European migrations as had occurred after the enlargement of the EU in 2004. The impact of immigration on the

economy, wages, resources and public services is much debated and hugely contentious. In December 2013 UK it was reported that the government were considering plans for cap annual EU migration at 75,000 in order to prevent an extreme influx. However this proposed policy was met with much criticism from many people across the political spectrum. It also is in direct contradiction with the principles of the European Union the freedom to live and work in different member states. Because of the EU principle of free movement the UK government cannot at present limit immigration from EU member states.

The anti-immigration think-tank 'Migration Watch UK' estimates that 50,000 migrants a year until 2019 from Romania and Bulgaria will enter the UK. Although this has been dismissed by many organisations as excessive, and the UK government has made estimates that it is more likely to be nearer 13,000 a year. The public often view immigration as negative and the media has fuelled a series of concerns over the potential of further migrants entering the country.

Firstly, there is a concern there will be a large rise in EU immigration. As highlighted by László Andor, the EU commissioner for employment, social affairs and inclusion, by the end of 2013 there were already three million people from Bulgaria and Romania living in other European Union member states. In essence, many of the people who wanted to move have already done so.

Secondly there is a concern there will be increased pressure on public services. However, many migrants to the UK are young and have moved to look for work. Under these circumstances they tend to place relatively few demands on public services. Many people think that it is too easy for migrants to access the social welfare system, this is despite that typically employment rates are higher among migrants. Evidence suggests that in fact migrants, in particular those from new EU member states are less likely to seek benefits than the general population. Economic migrants tend to be young and healthy and therefore do not place a lot of increased pressure on health services and the NHS.

Rapid arrival of large groups of immigrants can lead to concentrations of migrant communities. For those already living in that area this can cause concerns over public resources such as schools and hospitals and ultimately can lead to resentment if the character of the area begins to be eroded or changed. Migration of families may potentially increase pressure on school places at primary level in areas experiencing pressure on places and for some there may need to be increased provisions to assist with languages.

### **The future...**

With further enlargements of the EU, and restrictions removed from Bulgarians and Romanians working in the EU, it is possible that the UK will experience further changes to the patterns of immigration. This represents a key political, social and economic issue for the UK, and is likely to dominate discussions in the media speculating over potential impact on the UK for some time to come.

### **Points for Discussion:**

- How has the expansion of the EU changed the patterns of migration from EU countries to the UK?
- What are the impacts of EU migrants in the UK?
- Should further expansion of the EU and rights of EU members to migrate to the UK be a concern?

**Further reading:**

- 'Polish Migrants to the UK' (2013) Ginny Light *Geography Review* Volume 26 number 3
- The Migration Observatory for statistics and commentary on issues related to migration. In particular a briefing paper 'Migration Flows of A8 and other EU Migrants to and from the UK: [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk).
- Office for National Statistics for statistics on population in the UK: [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk).

**Key Points:**

- EU enlargement has provided opportunities for many citizens with the opportunity to live and work in other EU member states. This has been a facilitating factor in the changing rate of migration from many EU countries to the UK, especially from Eastern Europe.
- The primary motivation for migration to the EU from other EU countries is often to find work and there is no conclusive evidence that the last wave of immigration after 2004 had a negative effect on employment in the UK.

Biography: Jennifer Ferreira has a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Manchester. Her research focused on Labour Markets in Europe. She now works at Coventry University.